THOMAS NICKERSON

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Thomas Nickerson

(1902 - 1986)

Mr. Nickerson, originally a New Englander, first came to Hawaii in 1925 during a trip around the world. He returned in 1929 and the following year he married Lydia Avery Coonley and brought her here to live.

For a few years the couple engaged in research on the Charles Montague Cooke family, then Mr. Nickerson opened a bookstore in downtown Honolulu. In June of 1941 Mr. Nickerson took his family to Boston where he was to have an operation. World War II prevented their return to Hawaii until 1946. During the war years, Mr. Nickerson was employed by the United Pueblos Agency in New Mexico.

When the Nickersons returned to Hawaii, Mr. Nickerson began a twenty-one year career at the University of Hawaii where he established and directed the University of Hawaii Press. Since his retirement in 1966, he has contributed articles and light verse to several local publications and at one time had a column, "Tom Nickerson's Be My Guest," in the magazine section of the Sunday Star-Bulletin & Advertiser.

This transcript contains Mr. Nickerson's reminiscences about his personal experiences and employment, with special emphasis on the activities of the University of Hawaii Press.

Lynda Mair, Interviewer

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS NICKERSON

At his Arcadia apartment, 1434 Punahou Street, 96822

Sometime in 1971-72

N: Thomas Nickerson

M: Lynda Mair, Interviewer

M: Yes, just go ahead.

N: As easy as that. My name's Tom Nickerson. I'm a New Englander. I can trace my ancestry back ten generations. My first known ancestor was Lord Bishop of Derry, Ireland but my subsequent ancestors came, I believe, from England. They arrived off Cape Cod in 1736, just sixteen years after the Pilgrims did. They founded a town there--the Indian name was Monamoy--on Cape Cod and subsequently this was changed to Brewster.

My great-great-grandfather was David Nickerson. He was a ship owner. During the French Revolution he was about to cast off from France when a person came aboard and introduced himself and said that a child's life was in great danger and begged my great-great-grandfather to sail up an estuary and pick him up. Although Captain David was anxious to take off, he agreed to do so and in the dead of night heavily veiled women brought this child aboard. The name wasn't revealed. It was swathed in fine linen but there was no crest or monogram. They refused to reveal the identity of this child and Captain David took him home and raised him among his own children. Unfortunately he died in his teens before he was married, therefore, he has no issue but the inevitable query has arisen: Was this the lost dauphin? Nobody will ever know, of course.

His son, Thomas Nickerson, had a fleet of full-rigged ships that sailed around the world and I have on my wall a picture of the North America, a full-rigged sailing ship. When steam came in, he realized there was a great future here and he was the eighth president of the Santa Fe Railway.

M: Wait a minute. I've lost the connection here.

N: Thomas Nickerson first had a fleet of sailing ships and

went around the world. And then when steam was invented, he decided to give up sailing ships, wind power, for steam power and was eighth president of the Santa Fe Railway and raised funds for each mile of track that went westward across the continent. Is that clear now?

M: Yeh. I thought you were talking about steamships and then you said . . .

N: No. Oh no, he never was in steamships, just sailing ships.

Well, I was born in 1902. I went to Middlesex School in Massachusetts for six years and from there went on to Harvard. After I graduated, I took a trip around the world with one of my classmates and alighted here in Honolulu and was tremendously impressed with the place so that later, when I found myself inflicted with arthritis in New York City where I was living, it seemed foolish to be cooped up there and so I decided to come out to Hawaii for the benefit of my health--the sunshine and warm waters to bathe in--and I benefitted tremendously from it and decided to make it my home.

M: This was in 1929.

N: This was in 1929. In 1930 I married Lydia Avery Coonley and brought my bride out to the Islands. For a couple of years we engaged in research on the Charles M. Cooke family and then I opened a bookshop on South Queen Street in the Dillingham Building Annex. The shop, to begin with, was in the same room that Martha Kennedy and Louise Henderson had their Marlou Shop--M-A-R-L-O-U--which combined their first names. And then when they went out of business I took over the whole room. Next door was Hazel's Flower Shop. And later I opened up a picture gallery with Martha Kennedy on the floor above which was approached by that winding stairway that goes up to the second floor, which was operated in conjunction with the bookshop.

When Marlou was with me there, we really had quite a corner on the steamer trade. I had books, she had jams and jellies and lauhala mats and that sort of thing, and then there were flowers next door at Hazel's Flower Shop so we really did quite a bit of business on Saturdays when the Matson [Navigation Company] boats sailed. Is this the right kind of stuff?

M: Go on.

N: The first year I was in business, as with all retail businesses, there was a slack season in the middle of the year --middle of the summer when people are away and so forth--

so I decided that I would do something to make it known that there was a third bookshop in town--that is, in addition to Patton's and Honolulu Paper Company. So I had constructed what I called my bookcart. It was painted chrome yellow with apple green trim. It had an umbrella over it with the same colors and a pennant on the top that said Thomas Nickerson Books. It was on hospital ball bearing casters and we trundled it down through town every Saturday just before noon, having gotten permission from the harbor master to do this.

Well, we didn't sell a great many books there but we certainly got a lot of advertisement and people would say, "I'll meet you at the Nickerson book wagon." We had stamps there in case they wanted to stamp their letters. In those days the post office used to have a canvas bag they hung on the near end of the gangplank but they didn't come down early enough for some people so we'd take their mail and put it in the canvas bag later when it came. It was really quite an interesting experience. The first people to appear on the pier would be people in wheelchairs and on stretchers and the tempo was very low and sedate, and then it picked up till, towards the end, people were wildly rushing around--Where's our baggage? Where's the gangplank? Where's Uncle Ned? and all this. It was an interesting study in human nature.

Well, then I had to have an operation in Boston and had left the Islands on June 6, 1941 and fortunately I took my wife and my two boys with me because Pearl Harbor came along when I was still in a post-operative state. We decided to spend the war years in New Mexico at Albuquerque. Do you want me to say anything about what I did there?

M: Sure.

N: We had pictures of a delightful adobe house. We saw them in Boston before we decided where we were going to go and we knew there was a very good school for the boys so we just went out there on the basis of those two important elements and decided I'd take potluck on a job. Well, I ended up in the Indian service, United Pueblos Agency, and this had no relationship to anything I did before or was to do later. It was a very extraordinary experience.

I found that there was a strange gap between "the field," in quotes, and Washington. I thought at first that maybe the back was broken, then I wondered whether there was anything in the head. There was a story that was being bandied around when I was there. I don't know whether it's true or not but I think it's the most wonderful example of the lack of communication between Washington and the field.

A group of Washington area supervisors wanted to come

out to the United Pueblos Agency to make an inspection. Well, we had jurisdiction of the Pueblos up and down the Rio Grande but also we had three Navajo villages which were way out in the desert. Well, the days that they proposed to come coincided with the lambing season and during the lambing season the Navajo Indians left their hogans, which in themselves were way out in the desert, and went far further out with their tents and horses and helped the process of lambs being born. Well, when we wired Washington, saying that the suggested dates of their visit coincided with lambing season and suggested that they postpone their visit, the wire came back "Postpone lambing season." (laughter)

M: That's a good one.

N: When I came back to Honolulu after the war, I went to the Chamber of Commerce to see what opportunities there were. I was told that they were looking for a publications editor at the University [of Hawaii] and it was suggested that I go over to the Civil Service, which I did right away. They were extremely cordial. I just couldn't understand this. They rolled out the red carpet and "Yes, Mr. Nickerson, I'm sure that this can be arranged without any difficulty." It wasn't until later that I learned what the situation was. They couldn't find any properly qualified person in Honolulu for this position and President Gregg M. Sinclair was on the mainland trying to recruit for the position there and Civil Service was very much against bringing people in from the outside, so when they found that I was apparently qualified, they just cleared the way for me and ran me through all the red tape at a dizzying pace.

The first year I was on campus I was responsible for the establishment of the University of Hawaii Press and during the twenty-one years I was there I not only directed the press but I found, at the same time, I had to try to make the administration understand what a university press was and what it needed to perform its responsibilities. We weren't like any other division of the university. We were sort of way out in left field, a strange organization that nobody seemed to understand at all.

One of the things I did that led to activities after I retired was make an effort to do publishing for organizations in the community, just as many a university press does on behalf of groups that publish but don't have the facilities to do so. Three groups that the university press published for were Friends of the Library of Hawaii --we reprinted books that were valuable and rare and expensive and out-of-print; the University of Hawaii Committee for the Preservation and Study of Hawaiian Language, Art,

and Culture; and the Hawaiian Historical Society. So after I retired at the end of 1966, I served on these committees and headed each one of them eventually.

The Friends of the Library of Hawaii looked for opportunities to put on annual events that would be of some importance and attract people. I think the most successful annual meeting we had was when we had [Richard] Dick Armour, the famous satirist, come down and we doubled our attendance because of his name and he had everybody doubled up in stitches. He was extremely, extremely entertaining.

Last year our annual meeting consisted of a panel of four speakers to try to decide what kind of observance we should have for the Bicentennial of the birth of our nation in 1976 and the Bicentennial of the rediscovery of the Hawaiian Islands in 1978, two years later, by Captain Cook. This program really evolved from a program that the Committee for the Preservation and Study of Hawaiian Language, Art, and Culture had put on a month before. This was an interim session event called Preservation of Hawaiian Heritage and one of the workshops dealt with historical events, one of them being the two bicentennials. And also we felt that recognition should be given to the arrival and contributions of the various racial or ethnic groups that arrived in successive waves to provide field labor for the sugar cane plantations.

The third group that I was an officer of was the Hawaiian Historical Society. We, too, hoped to have events which would attract a good attendance. Two of the meetings we had when I was president: one was on the Falls of Clyde, the full-rigged ship which was sponsored by the Bishop Museum; and the other was at Alfie's Pub where we held our meeting and then conducted tours of neighboring buildings on what is known as the Merchant Square, which our Committee on Historic Buildings task force hoped would be preserved and utilized in an appropriate manner, such as restaurants and so forth.

Later, another organization had an event in that area where traffic was blocked off and this whole thing seemed to have great possibilities in terms of establishing a new tourist center. I remember so well in Boston, along Charles Street where all the antique shops are, they had installed a gaslight in place of electricity and they were ripping up the cement sidewalks and putting in brick ones as they were in the old days. Well, we felt that this had great possibilities as an adjunct of the tourist trade.

Is this the right kind of stuff?

M: Um hm. Shall we go back and I'll ask you some questions?

N: Sure.

M: Could I have your parents' names?

N: Yes. My father was Thomas Nickerson. My mother was Fanny Bates Hardy. Her ancestors were maritime people and one of them was a sea captain who permitted a Japanese man by the name of Nisima to board his vessel. Migration from Japan was not permitted but he was taken aboard and this Hardy brought him up in his own household and saw him through his college years and eventually Nisima went back to Japan and established a university there--Doshisha University.

M: Oh really.

N: All right. What else?

M: Your full name is Thomas Nickerson too.

N: Yes, Thomas Nickerson.

M: And your birthplace.

N: Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts.

M: Was this a small town?

N: Well, it's really a suburb of Boston.

M: And what did your father do for a living?

N: Father was manager of various public utilities. He was in Rhode Island and also Seattle, Washington. We were in Seattle, Washington when I went east to Middlesex School during my first five years there. Then my family came east to New York where we lived.

M: Okay. There was another question that just occurred to me. Oh, what was the date when you first came here on your trip?

N: 1925 was when I arrived on one of the Dollar [Steamship Line] boats.

M: That was on the trip around the world.

N: Yes.

M: And then after you came back, you said you were doing research on the Cooke family.

N: Yes, Charles M. Cooke.

M: Why?

N: Well, Mother Cooke, who as you know established the Honolulu Academy of Arts, wanted to have material gathered on her husband's life. He was an extraordinary person and there was hardly a single business activity that he wasn't associated with at one time or another. He established with P. C. Jones the Bank of Hawaii.

M: Just a moment, let me check. (recorder is turned off with Counter at 386)

END OF SIDE 1/1ST TAPE

Yeh, okay.

N: He was the president of C. Brewer and Company. He was identified with Castle & Cooke, Lewers & Cooke, almost every activity that was active in the economic history of the Islands. In fact, those were days when a limited group of people--of very extraordinary people--really had the business activities of the community in their hands and they were a highly estimable group of people who had in mind in everything they did the welfare of the community at large. They didn't seek to advance themselves personally. Nothing along the making-a-fast-buck philosophy in their thinking and much of what Hawaii is today, I feel, they were responsible for with their great wisdom and their great dedication.

There was Benjamin Franklin Dillingham who started the O.R. & L. Railway [Oahu Railroad and Land Company] and Mr. Cooke helped finance that activity. There was Peter Cushman Jones who, with Mr. Cooke, established the Bank of Hawaii. There was William R. Castle who was active in the establishment of Ewa Plantation when they found that there was artesian water there. There was Joseph Atherton who was active also in Castle & Cooke. A really wonderful group of people to whom we are, I feel, deeply indebted.

Just as an example, Charles Cooke became a very wealthy person but he said that had he traded during the time when there were good prospects of annexation, had he traded Hawaiian securities when there was a tremendous boom--if he'd bought and sold--he could have been many times a millionaire, but he said he always was concerned for the people who would buy stock he would sell, many of them probably on margin and borrowed capital, and it was just against his principles to do this, which is an attitude of mind that is extraordinary. I don't think that the people who trade in the market now worry about what's going to happen to people who buy.

Another example of his great public-spiritedness was

the fact that when a whole lot of fly-by-nights--speculators--came down from the mainland when this great boom that preceded annexation was at its height, they would try to benefit by artificial stimulation of the market and so forth and Charles Cooke decided, in order to stabilize the situation, that he would trade constantly at levels that were appropriate and try to offset this inflationary tendency that these speculators were trying to create for their own personal benefit.

M: How did you come to go to work on this job?

N: Well, Mother Cooke--Mrs. Charles M. Cooke--and Dora Isenberg came to our house and asked us if we wouldn't consider doing this.

M: How did they know about you?

N: Well, my wife had been associate editor of Harper's Bazaar in New York and I was interested in this sort of thing. An extraordinary situation existed because in those days it took a long time for letters to come down here and it was fairly expensive. Postage was fifty cents at one time. Letters were kept; they weren't thrown away. They were circulated among other members and friends of the family, so there was an accumulation of letters that came in great trunks. We read about twenty thousand letters. Now this is phenomenal, so that his life was very well documented.

M: What did you do then with your . . .

N: Then we turned over the material to the Cooke family, having taken quotations and summaries of letters off onto ten thousand three-by-five cards. I made a tremendous chart showing the events in his life, his parents' lives, the parents of his wife's lives, all his relations, and events in his children's lives as they grew up. And also on the chart was historical events--events in Hawaii; events in the world-at-large--so that you could read along the lines of the sixty years of his life and see where everybody was and what was going on. We interviewed every member of the family and friend of the family who was then living and under those conditions it was extraordinary how soon many of them were no longer alive. And this is one of the things that you have in mind, I'm sure, in this project that you're administering.

M: Yes, there's so many people already that we have in a project that even started two or three years ago.

N: I know it. I know it.

M: They're just gone.

N: Well, this Committee for the Preservation and Study of Hawaiian Language, Art, and Culture I'm chairman of, we're doing that so far as the old Hawaiians are concerned. We're interviewing them in their own language and on all things to do with place names and legends and so forth, and then translating them and editing them and cataloging them. We have, the last I heard, something like six miles of tapes. Now this is tremendously valuable material.

M: Did you know Mrs. C. Cooke very well? Charles Montague Cooke.

N: Charles Montague Cooke.

M: Had she already established the academy?

N: The academy was established, I believe, in 1926, four years before I came back with my wife. But I was fortunate enough, through the aunt and uncle of my wife who I came down to the Islands with, and through the then Marcia Richards who was our guide during this daylighting visit in 1925, to be introduced to the Cooke family, which has many ramifications, and to the Castles and other of the descendants of the missionaries. So we had already known them and entertained them in our home and been guests in theirs.

M: I see.

N: Now, of course, they were among the people we interviewed because they remembered their father and many of them were carrying on the various businesses which he, when Honolulu was a lot smaller, handled singlehandedly.

I don't know whether you want things about the university or not.

M: Yeh, before we get there I want to ask you more about your bookstore. How did you come to decide on a bookstore?

N: Well, I learned that the Castles and the Cookes and the other well-to-do people who did a good deal of traveling weren't able to find the kind of books in Honolulu that they wanted to buy. There was a resistance among the book buyers in the existing stores so far as anything that cost over five dollars. They sort of by and large made this an arbitrary ceiling and I knew that the people whom I've mentioned had big charge accounts in San Francisco bookstores and in Krock's in Chicago and in Brentano's in Washington and so forth. And I said to myself, why not

put in a bookstore where we'd not only have a general line of books but made a special effort to get the more expensive editions, the fine editions, the limited editions, autographed editions and so forth? So I would get the publishers' materials on these forthcoming books and post them in my store with a place for people to sign up for them before they arrived. These great cases came down as big as coffins full of these high-priced books, most of which were already sold before they arrived, and in that sense I think I established a reputation for the finer books.

One thing I did that pleased me very much: there were a lot of houses being built in those days--there was a sort of a big stimulation in the building trades--but rarely did they have bookshelves or rarely was there space reserved for a library or a den, so I had underneath the stairway in my bookshop what I called the model library. It was only about eight-by-nine feet square but it was a delightful little room. It had a table and lamp and book reviews were there, a comfortable chair beside it; it had a desk underneath a hunting print, as I remember, flanked by glass cabinets for fine editions and fine bindings. The back wall was lined with books; underneath the stairway was a terrestrial globe, lighted from above, and underneath that were deep shelves but not very high to keep Atlases and prints and things like that. There was a telephone in there and, of course, cards for people to write messages when they were sending books to people. It was a very personalized sort of shop and it always is very pleasant to hear people who remember it.

M: And you were in business there for how many years?

N: From 1935 until it was liquidated when I was in Boston after Pearl Harbor. I would have dearly loved to have been able to come back but they were evacuating children and women and people who were not physically very active. I would have loved to have sold books to the Armed Forces. Anything between the covers of a book, no matter what's in the middle, they loved and they bought hand-over-fist. And I'm sorry that I had to sell my house which was on the Waialae Golf Course. I had seen a moving picture, a newsreel, of what appeared to be the Waialae Golf Course with old jalopies and trunks of trees and so forth distributed all over it and I recalled that when Kamehameha invaded Oahu it was there, at Kahala, that he landed from his boats. So I said to myself, "This is no time to hang on to that house." It was just out of the city limits--just inside or just out of--and I couldn't imagine that under those circumstances it would be profitable to keep it but it turned out otherwise. So I had it sold and I was always

sorry for it and sorry for not having been able to be here to sell books to the military during the war but you can't blame yourself for those things in retrospect.

M: No, you can't. No. When you went to work at the university when you came back, what sort of things were they publishing then?

N: Well, most of the things we published were annual reports of the president, which was made up of reports of all the deans and directors, and scholarly manuscripts from the experiment station, and informational material from the extension service, lectures that were given at commencement and Charter Day exercises.

The first book that required reprinting was Ralph Kuykendall's The Hawaiian Kingdom. The first volume of it had gone out of print and that was the first book we published and it was that that recommended itself to the board of regents to have published and to become the first book of the University of Hawaii Press.

M: That was the first hardcover book that you published.

N: Yes. But it was rather amusing. We established a University Press Committee and they did everything so far as selecting the paper and the type face, everything, and all entered in in doing what later, of course, the managing editor and the book designer and all that would do. I tried every year to get a new position for the press and the most I was able to do during twenty-one years was to get a staff of six. [Thomas] Tom Hamilton, when he came in as president, was the first person really to take a great interest in the press. And then the dean of the graduate school began to realize that as the graduate school developed, there was a pressing need for publication. If a manuscript isn't published it just serves no useful purpose, so he began to influence the enlightened attitude toward the function of a university press in an educational institution.

But the expansion of the press really didn't take place till a year or two after I left due to their fine work with the legislature on the press's behalf so that, whereas I hadn't been able to get one new position year after year, we got four positions the year after I left the press. (Lynda chuckles) It brought us up to ten people and it really put us in a position where we could really handle almost anything that we were required to do.

Then, when the East-West Center was started, the East-West Center Press came into being which I'd always felt was not necessary. The press could have handled almost anything that they wanted published but various peo-

ple felt otherwise and this press grew up in competition with ours, although the kind of things they published was more reprints and translations than the kind of things the University Press would be expected to do--scholarly manuscripts generated by members of the faculty or people elsewhere, so long as they dealt with Hawaii and the Pacific. But this year the two presses have finally been combined after years of negotiation.

M: Oh, they have been?

N: Yes, and as our press expanded the East-West Center Press contracted because of the lack of support of federal funds so I'm happy to say that my successor, Robert W. Sparks, is director of both of them together. East-West Center manuscripts, I understand, will be published by the combined presses but they will retain their own imprint.

M: That reminds me of something I wanted to ask you. (recorder is turned off and on again)

N: Is it (the recorder) on?

M: Yeh.

N: P. C. Jones was also a New Englander and in later years, after he became deeply entrenched in the sugar industry, he delighted in telling this story: He said that his first job was in a merchandising establishment--he was a clerk--and with the first money he drew out of his account he bought a green overcoat and he was very proud of it and he decided to walk to the house of his aunt to show it off. On the way, there was a place where a large barrel of molasses had rolled off a dray and burst on the pavement and there was a big pool of this sticky, slippery substance. In skirting it, he fell in by mistake and he always used to say that the first money he ever made he put into sugar. (laughter)

He also was a great character. I understand he used to sit down in the lobby of the Young Hotel with a gold-headed cane. He was quite a portly person and a rather forbidding person physically but he really was a very tender-hearted person. He used to watch the carriages go by from his home in, I believe it was, Nuuanu and whenever a hearse went by he'd say, "You know, people are just dying to ride in that." (laughter)

M: He also, I think, started Hawaiian Trust Company.

N: Yes, and it was out of that that the Bank of Hawaii came, because his son was there and so was Clarence H. Cooke,

one of C. M. Cooke's sons, and they switched over from that and became cashier and teller for the Bank of Hawaii when it opened up.

But Jones, whenever he sneezed, he sneezed a whole series of times and there was a great difference of opinion in the family whether it was five times or six or seven or how many times it was; but everybody in those days knew each other very intimately and knew everything about each other and everybody knew that when P. C. Jones sneezed, he sneezed just so many times. One day in church he started to sneeze and the minister immediately recognized that it was P. C. Jones that would sneeze and he stopped his sermon and everybody counted on their fingers till the usual number of sneezes had taken place and then the minister resumed his sermon. (laughter)

M: Can you remember any particularly interesting things that happened at the university or before that?

N: Yes. I think, incidentally, that you might be interested to know that during the time I was there, much of which time my boss was Willard Wilson who was dean of the arts and sciences--he became provost and then secretary of the university--I was assistant to him when he was provost.

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M: Yes, okay.

N: Both of us would dictate memoranda on amusing and interesting information about the university and this was accumulated in one place and he is now writing a history of the University of Hawaii, doing it on the basis of biography--some of the outstanding people, making a very human sort of book rather than, you know, on a certain date this happened and that happened. He now has retired to a house at Kula on Maui and I'm very much interested in this and if need were to arise for me to work with him I'd be very happy to do so, because I always enjoyed working with him.

M: How old a man is he now?

N: He's either a year older or younger than I am.

M: Has he been here a long time? Would he be a good person, I mean, for me to talk to?

N: Yes, he was here long, long before I came. See, I worked at the campus in 1946 and he was there in the late twen-

ties. He would be an excellent person to interview in terms of how long he had been at the university and also he's a very vocal, articulate person and has a wonderful sense of humor and a great appreciation for the little interesting incidents that happen. I'd say that he'd be an excellent person to contact.

M: Okay.

N: Well, I hope he brings in some of the amusing things that I remember and I'm sure he will.

Louis Hencke--H-E-N-C-K-E--headed the experiment station on the campus when I first went there. There were a good many fields of alfalfa and other fodder for animals and I remember him saying that every time a new building went up, a dozen cows went on relief. (laughter) But then, of course, later all the farm animals went over the hill and they're located on the windward side of the island now.

Well, I can remember when I got a call from President Sinclair and he said, "Something's happened. It's very distressing." He said, "A piece of art has been stolen. This is vandalism! Desecration! I'll call the police." I said, "Well, what is it, Gregg?" "Oh," he said, "you know that little stick piece of statuary that. . . ." I can't think of the name now but it will come to me in a minute. There was a student who had made this little stick statue of two figures. I imagine one was a man and one was a woman. You had to look at them very carefully to know which was which and it was on a pillar outside the bookstore and it had been sawed off at the ankles. So I did a little research in the matter and I found that the sculptor himself was dissatisfied with it, although it was a gift to the university from his senior class. He sawed it off at the ankles and had taken it home because he didn't think it was any good. (laughter)

M: Did they replace it?

N: I don't think they did, no. Bumpei Akaji was his name and he's a well-known artist now. He did a mosaic on the ceiling of one of the stairways leading down from the second floor of Hemingway Hall.

The registration before World War II was about twenty-six hundred as I recall and after the war was over it doubled and that was the era when a great many buildings began to be built. The first of these was the administration building where my office was.

M: You mean Bachman Hall?

N: Bachman Hall. And I can remember people saying, "Oh, it's such a long walk down there." Well, good lord, you look at it now, it's spread all over the place. (laughter)

M: Yeh. It still is a long walk to some places, that campus.

N: It is, it is, but Bachman Hall was almost next door to the original buildings. I don't know whether you want any of the details of this but one whole wall of my office facing toward the south was what is called brise de soleil and this sort of an egg-box type of construction, multiple squares, was invented by a French architect and was used in South American buildings a great deal. Well, I had one of those. It constituted the whole wall and President Sinclair was very proud of this new building and especially the brise de soleil and he'd bring people down there and say, "Now Mr. Nickerson, here he has these brise de soleil and from morning till night the sun never comes in and disturbs him." I let this go for awhile and finally I said, "Now look, Gregg, about three o'clock in the afternoon in the summertime that sun just comes streaming horizontally in on me and I feel like an orchid in a greenhouse." (Lynda laughs) And so he changed the story. He said, "Well, at three o'clock it begins to come in in summer and Mr. Nickerson just picks up his work and takes it home." (laughter)

M: I'd be interested in more details about the press if you recall anything about the operation.

N: Well, there was one thing about the press and that was that it was operating just prior to statehood and at that time libraries throughout the nation and individuals were curious to know what kind of a place this prospective new state was and so we had a very lively sale of our books on the mainland because of this great interest. At that time, too--well, I eventually got the title of public relations director at the university--I was just overwhelmed with people coming down--reporters, writers, photographers from Life magazine and newspapers, various magazines and newspapers and so forth--who wanted material on the university and this was great for the university and for the state because many of them came to me first and wanted to get oriented and wanted to know where to go to get their stories and take their photographs. One of them was the person who's behind the book The Hawaiians. What's his name? The one that Ed Sheehan and Gavan Daws did the text for. Bob Goodman. He was doing work for the National Geographic magazine at that time.

During my twenty-one years as director we did somewhere between seventy-five and a hundred books. We'd do up to five a year and now, of course, they're doing twenty

or twenty-five books a year.

M: Did the press make ends meet or did it have to be subsidized?

N: Very few university presses make both ends meet. Their kitty has to be sweetened each year. They're not supposed to make money because the main purpose of the university press is to publish manuscripts that commercial publishers are not interested in because of its limited sale, albeit to a very important audience. The editions were too small to interest them. Printing prices went up constantly and publishers are really interested in best sellers or the works of promising authors who eventually might produce some best sellers. So, in other words, the editions are so small and uneconomically so that a press is bound not to make both ends meet. Some of the big ones possibly do but it's a very narrow margin and the director of the Harvard University Press said that the function of the university press is to publish as much as possible short of bankruptcy. (Lynda chuckles) Take the money they get and publish just as many books as is possible.

I attended the annual meetings every few years of the Association of American University Presses and I felt that . . . . Oh, they had a very active public relations program that embraced South America. They had representatives from there at their annual meeting and European presses but very little was done so far as Asia was concerned, so at this time the East-West Center was just coming into being and one of their programs had unexpended money. So I got the idea that we should have what we eventually called a Trans-Pacific Conference on Scholarly Publishing and the East-West Center financed it and I directed it and we had the representatives of scholarly publishing from ten countries around the border of the Pacific Ocean and we also had the directors of about ten university presses on the mainland. We had a conference of several days and it was a tremendously interesting and stimulating one and then we published the proceedings in a volume which I edited. I believe it has the same name as the conference, Trans-Pacific Scholarly Publishing, which embraced the papers delivered by all those who were called upon to make a resume of the situation in their respective countries. And as a result of this, I just read a short time ago that the Tokyo University Press--the director of it attended a meeting of the American association. He had organized the presses in Japan into the counterpart of our Association of American University Presses and he plans, either next year or very soon, to have the same kind of conference that I had here in Honolulu. It will include not only Japanese presses but scholarly publishers throughout Asia and he

phoned me on his way through. He said, "Your name will be mentioned as the person who first organized and directed this Trans-Pacific Conference." So this is very gratifying that something's coming out of it.

M: How are books chosen to be published. Did you do the deciding?

N: No, no, one can't do that. There's no one who has enough depth in the various fields of research, you know--various disciplines--so we, according to our charter, had an advisory committee of, I believe it was, seven members and we selected them very carefully from a diversity of fields of study so that we'd have a broad representation. And over the years we would rotate them to be sure that at least one time or another each major publishing branch of the university was represented, but we couldn't rely on just seven people. It eventuated in the press committee appointing readers who had depth in the subject matter of the manuscript to review it and we would have one, two, or possibly three persons and it wouldn't just be on the campus, from the community or just in the nation. It would be the best person no matter where they lived in the world to assess the manuscript under consideration and then these reports would be circulated and discussed at a meeting of the press committee and the rejection or acceptance of the manuscript would be based on what the advisory committee--on their decision in the matter.

M: Were there feelings about not getting a book published or your choices?

N: Well, the thing we had to guard against and we got into some trouble on account of a tendency for a person not to want to hurt the feelings of his associates and, therefore, give a rather more favorable reader's report than it warranted because of this loyalty or whatever you want to call it and so we tried to keep out of university politics and more often than not authority elsewhere would be among the readers advised. (long pause) But fortunately we had some very good ones. We had all three of Ralph Kuykendall's books under the title of The Hawaiian Kingdom. Charles Hunter completed the last few chapters of the third one after Kuykendall's death. And we had Gwenfread Allen's The [Hawaii's] War Years, which was an outgrowth of the War Records Depository where records of World War II were assembled and put into this section of the library. And we had very good material--very rich--from faculty members and otherwise elsewhere because there were very few universities which were much interested in the Pacific area. And we had the proceedings of conferences, like the Race

Relations in World Perspective Conference. We issued the proceedings of that and other conferences that took place of an international nature, like the East-West Philosophers' Conferences. Two of them, the second and the third, we published the proceedings of and we built up, on this basis, a very strong list of publications to do with the Pacific area comprehensively and also studies to do with Pacific islands. Our scientists and research people would go down to various of the islands and make reports. And then, of course, Mrs. [Mary Kawena] Pukui and [Samuel H.] Sam Elbert produced the Hawaiian-English Dictionary and the English-Hawaiian Dictionary which were followed by texts to teach Hawaiian and finally a text by Mrs. [Dorothy] Kahananui, Let's Speak Hawaiian.

The strength of the press is the number of books in a certain area that they build up and become really the publisher of a certain type of book in great breadth and depth.

M: Have you done any writing yourself?

N: At the present time I'm writing a column for the magazine section of the Sunday paper I started the first of January. It's called Tom Nickerson's Be My Guest.

M: Yeh, I've been reading it.

N: Really?

M: Enjoy it very much.

N: Good. I find this is a kind of writing I enjoy doing. The length of it is long enough to tell a story and yet short enough to make you very economical in the use of your words. In other words, it's highly disciplined and you try to make your words express as much as you possibly can, get all the meaning into it briefly. And I like being able to select my topic as I wish always. When George Chaplin agreed to have me do it he said, "Just make it light, light, light," so I try to have humor and things of some interest on the light side.

For many years I've written light verse. I suppose I've written two or three hundred pieces and they're published from time to time. They used to be published in the Honolulu Beacon and now they're published in Honolulu magazine. I followed Dave Eyre as editor from the one to the other.

M: Mr. Eyre is editor at . . .

N: He's editor of the Honolulu magazine and he was editor of

Beacon. I wrote a feature on Arcadia where I live. I've written an article on Hale Nani Hospital which will be published by the Beacon sometime towards the end of the year. A place like this for retirement residents is very interesting to me and it's amazing how fully it serves it purposes and makes it possible for retired people to live the kind of lives they like to live. And so far as Hale Nane is concerned, it's extraordinary how well they do their job of handling people who are physically and mentally incapacitated, quite different from the general hospital. A general hospital admits you on the basis of something that needs mending, like a broken leg, or some sickness that the patient hopefully will recover from, like pneumonia. But with a place like Hale Nani and other--what do you call them?--nursing hospitals, this is quite different. The people may break a leg and they may get pneumonia while they're there but the reason for their being is to make persons with certain deficiencies as happy and comfortable as they're capable of being and they treat the patient in the round. In some cases, the nurses are the only people that have communication with them. They substitute, in a sense, for the family which may come occasionally--maybe there aren't any left--so that these nurses are a very dedicated group and it's interesting the way they draw people out to be as active as possible, to be as active in terms of their capabilities as possible. Some of them may have a very narrow capability but what they do do the nurses have helped them to generate great interest in. And these people have an assigned place in the occupational therapy room and if anyone sits in that place, believe me they're very unhappy about it and they go in there with great enthusiasm and they make children's rattles out of bottle tops and they make dusters by stringing wool on coat hangers. These are all very simple things but they're as proud of things they make as a child would be of the things he makes at a summer camp or in manual training work in school. I have great respect for the whole philosophy. The ministers of various denominations come regularly. They have music regularly or entertainers, generous in coming from churches and elsewhere to entertain them. It's really a great thing that they do. A good many of Hawaii's outstanding citizens have been there or are there or will eventually be there. It's nice to know there's such a wonderfully conducted activity.

I think I'm probably talking too much, aren't I?

M: No, that's okay. Go on. I don't want to wear you out, though.

N: I don't seem to come forth with too much about the university. Goodness, I've dictated all kinds of memoranda

about things that used to happen. When the university started, of course, it's first building, or really two buildings, were on Thomas Square where Lincoln School now is. And when the first building, Hawaii Hall, was built the campus was crisscrossed with stonewalls to fence off these little dwellings where there were pigs and chickens and so forth, and so there was a tremendous amount of stones that needed to be taken off the campus before they could do any landscaping. These stones were taken in drays to the harbor and used in the ships as ballast, so they went all over the world.

M: Hmm. You mean the fences were stone.

N: Stonewalls, yeh, the way the old Hawaiian habitations usually were.

END OF SIDE 1/2ND TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW

Re-transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen

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THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.